

ON

THE EPISTERNAL BONES

OCCASIONALLY

FOUND IN MAN.

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NOT having found any English anatomist—nor, indeed, any Foreigners, among those with whom I have conversed—who were able to say they had seen episternal bones in the human subject, it has seemed to me well to present the English reader with a sketch, from the only instance that has fallen within my own observation.



First Bone of the Sternum, surmounted by two small Symmetrical Bones.  
POSTERIOR VIEW.

The subject of the above peculiarity was a man\* of a decidedly well-developed form:—which remark is the only particular of correlative history to which I can attach importance, in connexion with the rare formation depicted

\* See the history of C. C. Brown, aged 25—who died sixteen days after fracture of the dorsal vertebræ and dislocation of the sternum—in the *Clinical Society's Book, Surgeons' Patients, Males* (B), Vol. I. p. 266 ; and (for the post-mortem history) in the *Tenth Miscellaneous Inspection Book*, p. 115.—See also No. 1038<sup>20</sup> in the Museum.

above. It coincides with one which I was accustomed to make, as a demonstrator in the dissecting-room, relative to the occurrence of supernumerary muscles in the more muscular bodies; but this was without any determined or statistical foundation.

M. Breschet states, that he has met with many instances of the existence of human episternal bones, somewhat larger than pisiform bones; having doubtless their proper centres of ossification, and having synovial articulations with the crest of the sternum (rather posterior), but liable to become united to that bone, or rather to lose the synovial cell\*.

The use of the episternal bones cannot, I suppose, but be insignificant; as that of a rudimentary thirteenth rib, or a sixth finger, or a diverticulum ilei.

M. Breschet seems to consider these bones as the rudiments or vestiges of imperfectly-developed ribs; and he forms an analogy between them and the episternal bones which are natural or essential parts of some animals. But with respect to the doctrines of analogy and gradation, it is not my aim to illustrate or extend them: I would rather wish most strictly to confine them; as I consider them as something worse than unprofitable, when pursued exclusively, or for their own sakes; and therefore always dangerous, unless some plain deduction seems to grow immediately from the study. The comparison of the fore extremity in different animals, for instance, may serve to explain the use of a part; but in all the resemblances and differences, considered together, I see nothing beyond this one thing, that the especial form of each is perfectly adapted to the use for which it was ordained†.

With regard to rare and accidental formations, their use and mode of production seem to belong more particularly to the domain of pathology.

\* He has given good delineations of some specimens, in an Essay in the *Annales des Sciences Naturelles*, 1838.

† Speaking of the almost countless bones in the paddle of *Icthyopaurus*, and the fins of fishes, Sir Charles Bell wonders what the naturalist can ever deduce from the mere theory of the gradual decrease, or change, of elementary parts: and this seems to me to apply everywhere. See the *Bridgewater Treatise on the Hand*, pp. 102 and 90.